

1994

SPEC

Tom Grimes

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SPEC · *Tom Grimes*

SPEC was first produced at the Red Barn Theatre in Key West, FL, June-July 1990. The director was Richard Magesis. Set and Lighting Design by Gary McDonald. Stage Manager: Katie Tierney. Assistant Director: Carole MacCartee. The cast:

Al Joe DeLuca
Browner Fred Gros
Ted Tom Murtha
Mike Tom Rhatigan
Hicks Tom Simmons

The Los Angeles production of SPEC opened on May 15th, 1991, and ran through August. The producers were Tom Bower, Paul Kozlo, and James Gammon. The director was Richard Magesis. Set and Lighting Design by Louis Mawcinnitt. Stage Manager: Mark Burnham. Assistant Director: Brenda Smith. The cast:

Al Robert Costanzo
Browner James Gammon
Ted Paul Gleason
Mike Dan Shor
Hicks Vance Valencia

Dedicated to: James Ingrassia, Jim & Nancy Gammon, and my wife Jody who saw the play to be written before I did.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A warehouse. Lights up low. PETE BROWNER, standing downstage beside a metal girder. He holds an envelope in one hand. Upstage, the silhouette of a man in profile.

BROWNER: So Boland. What you're saying is: one, you've got the manpower; two, you've got the financing; and three, you want us to cover your flanks by creating a smoke screen—a film—(*Browner indicates the envelope.*) . . . to cover any covert activities and/or the build-up of troops. Correct?

Silhouette nods.

BROWNER: In addition, you'd like us to handle weapons supplies, everything from M-60s down to penknives, in exchange for future military cooperation, and sites for reconnaissance bases.

Silhouette nods.

BROWNER: The time frame for carrying out the action is a green light within six to eight weeks. And the budget you've allocated for the action is twenty-five million American. We'll receive some seed money up front, then proceed on an installment basis. Agreed?

Silhouette nods.

BROWNER: Plus there's that separate deal. Some property? A ranch?

Silhouette nods.

BROWNER: Good. Oh, and your request that the people I contract know nothing about the project? Standard company policy.

Silhouette nods.

BROWNER: So, Boland. I'll be in touch.

Silhouette exits. Browner studies the envelope. Fade to black.

SCENE TWO

Al's office. Large, disorganized. Filled with law books, papers, film equipment, movie posters, a desk, and a couple of chairs. AL and MIKE are seated. Lights up.

AL: OK. Now. The money—the option money—is coming in on this. The money will be here any day. But, in the meantime, this is, I feel, a firm thing about which we have an understanding, so I would rather not discuss the money thing right now. The money is there. All I'm saying is—we have to wait.

MIKE: This is money that's coming from your law partners.

AL: No.

MIKE: But that's what you said.

AL: No. Mike. As we discussed, I'm in the process of moving out of the law business. I'm wrapping up a few cases for friends, and then I'm moving into film.

MIKE: So the money's coming from the film people.

AL: Correct.

MIKE: When do you think I can expect the money?

AL: Mike, I've told you. Things move very slowly in this business. You're going to have to be patient.

MIKE: *(Short pause)* You're not making my story into a film.

AL: Who's saying your story will never be made into a film? Would I have bought it if I believed that?

MIKE: You haven't bought it.

AL: I have.

MIKE: You haven't paid me for it.

AL: That's irrelevant. I'm *committed* to paying you for it. (*Short pause*) Look, Mike. We have to look ahead, but we also have to look at now. . . . Ahead I'm seeing a film made from your story. Or, possibly, television. Movie of the Week. You've got a domestic situation, the family unit—kids, grandparents, the dog—so already you've got mega-potential for lucrative spin-off properties built in. Also, you've got the cancer angle, which is always a good TV sell. But this is long term talk. This is down-the-road, looking-ahead planning. And for now we have to look at now. (*Short pause*) I know what you're thinking. You're thinking there's no movie. (*Mike looks at Al with disbelief.*) You're thinking there's no movie, no project, no anything. It's defeatist, unproductive energy. I don't know where it comes from—maybe you had a bad childhood or something—but I cannot work with it. I've seen this before. Self-pity. You don't get the big break by the time you're twenty-five you feel cheated, your life is over, shot. Well, can I tell you what happens to people who pity themselves? (*Beat*) They do not get to write screenplays. (*Beat*) So, you have a choice. You can either *not* pity yourself and get what you want. Or you can blame your not getting what you want on anything and everything but yourself and thereby unconsciously prevent yourself from getting what you want—only without the guilt—so that—who knows?—maybe you still wind up getting what you want, only you think you wanted the other thing which you didn't get, and now you're miserable even though you got what you wanted. Follow? Mike, what am I saying? I'm saying the choice is yours. (*Pause*) Now. Would you like to work together?

MIKE: (*Short pause*) On what?

AL: A project I can *sell*. Can I interject a word of advice? (*Beat*) Listen to me. What sells?

MIKE: Good stories.

AL: Sex and death. *Death Wish*. Big movie. What did it have?

MIKE: Sex and death?

AL: Violent death! Right. *(Beat)* But forget *Death Wish*. They've done it four times and, frankly, we don't have the money to rip off something that classy. Remember one thing: *money*. Every word you write down costs money. You write "the," three thousand teamsters gotta move half a city across the street. So. What am I saying?

MIKE: Keep costs in mind.

AL: I'm saying violence and mayhem cost money. Megabucks. We don't have megabucks.

MIKE: So you want me to keep it simple. Throw in a little more character.

AL: Character is a wonderful thing. But we don't have the money to buy actors who can act like characters.

MIKE: *(Short pause)* Well, what do we have?

AL: Basically. . . ? Some girls who'll take off their clothes. *(Mike attempts to get up. Al pushes him back down into his seat.)* Mike. I'm just saying. We've got a few young actresses who've worked with us before. Beach blanket bingo type movies. They're young, they're pretty, they'll get undressed. If you don't have that, you don't get the young guys into the theatres.

MIKE: *(Short pause)* Are you saying you have a specific story in mind you'd like me to write?

AL: I have notes. Outlines. Ideas. *(Beat)* I want to lay them out for you. I want you to dwell on them. *(Beat)* Can I lay the first one out for you?

MIKE: *(Long beat)* Go ahead.

AL: *(Short pause)* *Virus*.

MIKE: *(Pause)* *Virus*?

AL: *Virus*. That's the title. The idea. Don't you see it? Ten million movie marquees, in black plastic lettering— *Virus*. (*Beat*) You like it?

MIKE: (*Short pause*) It's simple.

AL: It's familiar. Everybody knows what a virus is, so there's no lack of audience identification. This is what makes it universal. We start with a common cold. Do a real Spielbergian domestic Cuisinart blender household number, open up with a lot of real Americana tracking shots, establish the scene. Now. The parents leave pretty seventeen-year-old Sally home for the weekend. You want to get the parents out of the way immediately. Parents are death at the box office. Kill the parents.

MIKE: Parents dead.

AL: OK. Good. Now Sally calls her friends the instant her parents leave in the Saab. They invite some boys over. This is where we throw in the sex angle.

MIKE: They all start jumping into bed.

AL: Right. OK. Now, little Joey, Sally's little brother, suddenly comes down with a fever. He comes home from school he looks like . . .

MIKE: Casper the Ghost.

AL: Great. Terrific. Write that down.

MIKE: He picked up the virus in school. Like we'll see him at the water fountain with some lower middle class kids—

AL: No. School is out. You gotta get a building, fill it full of kids, the whole thing costs too much time and money. I want to keep it simple. I want a virus to appear, wreak havoc, then get wiped out by some new brand of mega-antibiotic. The virus can run rampant, but only on one block. Remember: horror movies are microcosms of society. One street represents all of society. So: Think small. Think microcosm. (*Short pause*) Help me. I'm totally lost.

MIKE: Joey.

AL: Right. Joey. Joey comes in, his stomach hurts. Sally, like a good sister, tucks him in, etc. In spite of this, his temperature climbs. Sally calls the doctor, a good-looking intern named—Matt, who Sally has a crush on.

MIKE: And he wants to get into Sally's pants.

AL: No. Sally's the heroine; therefore her pants never come off. Pants come off secondary girlfriend characters who are slaughtered by this raging out of control virus ten seconds after they have sex with their boyfriends. Got it?

MIKE: Got it. Secondary characters fuck and die. Keep lust to a minimum.

AL: Good. Now, Matt leaves, the other kids come over, they're jumping into bed, etc. What happens? Little Joey's temperature SKYROCKETS! He starts changing, getting more hideous. He's turning into this, this, this—

MIKE: Thing.

AL: Thing! Exactly! You know, the red spots in the eyes, the vomit spewing across the room.

MIKE: Sounds like *The Exorcist*.

AL: *The Exorcist*. I didn't think of that. Nobody's done an *Exorcist* rip-off for years. It could be viable.

MIKE: Are Sally's parents religious people?

AL: When confronted by grief and death, yes.

MIKE: So this couldn't be a speaking-in-tongues, gospel-type experience then, could it?

AL: Definitely not. (*Beat*) Although, if you could *imply* that without stating it, so that we have this straightforward virus thing, and then tie in on a subliminal level this cult-like Black Mass religiouso mumbo-jumbo type theme, we could double our audience.

MIKE: Like, “Was it a virus . . . or was it . . . God?”

AL: (*Long pause*) I think I have to love it. If we could get someone like Rod Steiger to play a minister type part—hire him for three days, throw in some flashback scenes, have him appear as an apparition—I think it would class up the project immeasurably.

MIKE: Rod Steiger? We can afford him?

AL: Him. Caesar Romero. Shelley Winters.

MIKE: Shelley Winters?

AL: Whatever. That’s not important. What I’m saying is we get some star of the past, guy hasn’t worked in twenty years. We fly him in for three days, give him a few meals, then splash his name all over the posters. (*Beat*) I love this. OK. Tell you what I want you to do. You have a VCR?

MIKE: Yes.

AL: Good. You take our notes, you go home, you dwell on them. You rent the following movies: *The Hills Have Eyes*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, and *Slumber Party Massacre*. Study them. Take notes. Watch the pacing, watch the form. See how many they kill every ten minutes, then kill that many. Remember, we have a restless, interminably bored, vastly undereducated youth population out there. They’ll watch anything. So. What am I going to tell you?

MIKE: (*Beat*) Put in sex and death?

AL: Make the script bad enough, we could have a monster cult hit on our hands.

Blackout.

SCENE THREE

A bench in a city park. Lights up. TED is seated, dressed in an expensive suit. Browner is seated beside him. They are eating lunch.

TED: We were there, Petey.

BROWNER: Absolutely, Ted.

TED: I'm not here today you weren't there. No way. No way, José.

BROWNER: Fate, Teddy.

TED: Fuck fate. I owe you.

BROWNER: You've always played ball, Ted. Little projects . . .

TED: Hey, who am I not to play ball, Petey?

BROWNER: Well, some guys—

TED: I am not some guys. Payback time, I'm here. Petey, for you, I'm here.

BROWNER: I know.

TED: There's a rapport, a bond.

BROWNER: Democracy, Ted. Freedom.

TED: Democracy above a certain income level is heaven on earth, Pete.

BROWNER: Being poor wasn't pretty.

TED: It was not a by-choice arrangement, Petey. It sucked big time is what it basically did.

BROWNER: But being poor *and* having no freedom, Ted.

TED: Is why God made McDonald's and television, Petey.

BROWNER: *(Beat)* I'm talking real poverty and repression, Ted.

TED: Oh. *(Beat)* Third World poverty? *(Browner nods.)* It's a shame.

BROWNER: I know.

TED: A huge market completely untapped. Makes me sick.

BROWNER: *(Short pause)* But, hey, what are we complaining about? We're doing all right. Could do better, but we're doing all right.

TED: Everyone could always be doing better, Petey. But this is gravy. I've said it before, you weren't there, I'm dead. Minimum out a limb, maybe even a dick. Who knows? *(Ted points a finger at Browner.)* I owe you.

BROWNER: I know.

TED: Call it in any time.

BROWNER: I might.

TED: *(Pause)* So, why the park? What was wrong with my office?

BROWNER: I'd like to discuss a deal, Ted. A chance to do better.

TED: And my office isn't the place to do it?

BROWNER: It's a quiet kind of thing, Ted. I have a project, a very lucrative project—a film actually, something that would be fun to do. But the political situation surrounding the project is, well, not always as open-minded about capitalism as it should be.

TED: Hey, Petey, I don't care. I'm an investment banker. I make money. Health spas, malls, amusement parks for neo-non-communist countries. Microwave popcorn in eighteen flavors. It's all the same to me. A country wants its political apparatus going to hell on a handcart, so be it. Internal strife? It is not my lookout. Solve the world's problems? Hey, it is not my job. You want a film, I can do a film. Now, how much are we talking about?

BROWNER: I'd like to give you only a very general—

TED: Vast sums. Good.

BROWNER: Ted, it's a discreet kind of—

TED: Huge sums. Love it.

BROWNER: Ted, we've been promised the help of—

TED: Help is helpful, Petey.

BROWNER: And you'd be helping the cause, Ted.

TED: If the runoff of our project is politically copacetic with the powers that be, or will be, so much the better. Glad to help.

BROWNER: And if it's any extra incentive—

TED: A percentage is incentive, Petey. That's my logo. *You* know it. *I* live by it.

BROWNER: I'm just saying, Ted—

TED: I'm listening.

BROWNER: —that we have things at our disposal—

TED: Things, resources, uh-huh.

BROWNER: And democratic interests can be served here if we handle this—

TED: Absolutely.

BROWNER: —in a spirit of—

TED: Way ahead of you.

BROWNER: —cooperation.

TED: Cooperation. Right. *(Pause)* So, how long do we have, Petey, altogether?

BROWNER: Six, eight weeks.

TED: Six eight weeks?

BROWNER: Longer you raise interest.

TED: Whose interest, Petey?

BROWNER: Competitors.

TED: *(Beat first)* We have a start up date?

BROWNER: A.S.A.P.

TED: Why so soon?

BROWNER: Why procrastinate?

TED: *(Short pause)* This isn't anything shady, is it, Pete?

BROWNER: I don't think so.

TED: Just exactly what kind of an area are we going into here?

BROWNER: A rural one.

TED: I meant—

BROWNER: I know.

TED: *(Short pause)* It is safe, isn't it, Petey?

BROWNER: Sleeping like a baby.

TED: Right. One minute they're sleeping like a baby, next they step out of the bush it's fucking Chinatown the 4th of July.

BROWNER: Times change; revolutions don't.

TED: You're getting me into a revolution?

BROWNER: I'm calling in a favor, Ted.

TED: Now?

BROWNER: Yes.

TED: (*Short pause*) You got it.

BROWNER: Thank you.

TED: Hey, my life. Thank you. (*Short pause*)

TED: So what do I owe you? What's the shot?

BROWNER: (*Short pause*) Well, let's say you've got this country—

TED: This imaginary country.

BROWNER: In the hands of a brutal, non-Westernized, Marxist dictatorship.

TED: The accents, the scraggly beards, right.

BROWNER: Now the leader—

TED: The head honcho.

BROWNER: —is a real—

TED: Mad dog. Gotcha. Cut to a tent in the desert. You've got the running dogs, the rocket launchers, the olive-skinned broads in Banana Republic outfits, and El Jefe steps out of a tent, towel on his head, reverse angle, we see—an execution!

BROWNER: A brutal execution.

TED: Right. And we cut to a medium close up of . . . who?

BROWNER: Counterrevolutionaries. Democratic leaders in exile. Freedom fighters.

TED: The white guys.

BROWNER: In a manner of speaking.

TED: OK. Good. Now what?

BROWNER: Our sympathies established, we—

TED: Right. Introduce the hero.

BROWNER: —the—

TED: Knight in shining armor.

BROWNER: —leader of the—

TED: Forces of right and goodness. Absolutely.

BROWNER: (*Short pause*) Just someone we can live with, Ted.

TED: Right. A Mubarak. A King Fahd. A pre-Kuwait Saddam.

BROWNER: This is a man of the people, Ted.

TED: A Lech Walesa. Vaclav Havel.

BROWNER: Whose stature has grown to heroic propor—

TED: A Nelson Mandela type figure. Sidney Poitier. I think we could get Sidney Poitier. Maybe James Earl Jones. I've got an agent friend who has an agent friend who—

BROWNER: Forget the coons.

TED: (*Short pause*) Excuse me?

BROWNER: No coon heroes. (*Short pause*) Look, I think we're getting a little off the track here, Ted. (*Beat*) We need a script.

TED: *(Pause)* You want a script.

BROWNER: That's right.

TED: Of this idea. *(Ted indicates the envelope Browner has laid on the bench.)*

BROWNER: Right.

TED: *(Short pause)* What is this idea, Petey? As you see it?

BROWNER: In a nutshell? An exiled leader, a hero of the people, puts together an army of freedom fighters. He trains them in a country adjacent to his homeland which is sympathetic to his plight. The freedom fighters go in, depose the brutal, non-Westernized, Marxist dictatorship, democracy and free trade are restored, the hero rides off into the sunset with pledges of U.S. economic aid and contracts for billions in military hardware. *(Short pause)* Am I reaching you, Ted?

TED: *(Beat)* Yeah, yeah. So you want sort of a political action thing set in—

BROWNER: “In” is not important, Ted. *Where* is not important. The *story's* what's important. Let us worry about where where is.

TED: *(Short pause)* I'm getting confused here, Browner.

BROWNER: That's fine.

TED: I don't think it's fine.

BROWNER: Let us worry about that.

TED: This country—

BROWNER: —is being very cooperative, Ted.

TED: How cooperative?

BROWNER: Name it. Permits. Labor. Housing.

TED: Military . . . ? *(Short pause)* This character is a character, right?

BROWNER: I'm roughing it out for you, Ted.

TED: This is not a rea—

BROWNER: Just get us a script, Ted. A words on paper script. And a crew. A film crew. That's all we're asking. (*Short pause*) I'd like to be able to say you helped on this, Ted. It could mean things for you, politically, in the future. (*Beat*) The project's committed to the tune of—twenty million. You can buy a lot of affection, not to mention developable beachfront real estate in the Third World with that kind of dough. (*Beat*) We're committed, and we're going ahead. (*Beat*) You coming, Ted?

TED: (*Short pause*) I don't know.

BROWNER: (*Glaring*) Ted, please don't make me enunciate this.

TED: (*Beat*) You just want a movie?

BROWNER: Just a movie.

TED: No games?

BROWNER: No games.

TED: (*Short pause*) What's my end?

BROWNER: (*Beat*) Twenty-five percent of the gross budget.

TED: Five million?

Browner nods.

TED: (*Beat*) Write the check.

Blackout.

SCENE FOUR

Al's office. Lights up. Mike is pacing, eyeing Al. Al, seated, is reading Mike's script intently. When he turns the last page, he flips the binder closed and pats the script reverently.

AL: I have to tell you something. This is a script I could love. *(Beat)* If there could be physical bonding between a man and a screenplay, *Virus*, for me, would be that screenplay.

MIKE: The gasoline . . . ?

AL: On the hair—

MIKE: —the beach, night—

AL: —the terror, the bondage—

MIKE: —the whole sexual subtext—

AL: —the gunpowder in the mouth—

MIKE: —the exploding head!

AL: *(Beat)* I cried. *(Beat)* I'm a man, I cried. *(Beat)* Sweet little Sally dead? This was the death of innocence.

MIKE: You said to kill her. That's the formula.

AL: I know it's the formula, the genre. But what you've done. What you've. . . . *(Beat)* You look around today, what do you see? Cynicism, despair, greed. The homeless, the dying. *(Beat)* And here we are—two not undecent white men, afflicted by no terminal diseases, and living in what was till recently the wealthiest country in the world—and we're trying to what? Pander to the lowest form of intelligence imaginable solely in order to turn a buck. And I have to stop sometimes—*Virus* made me stop, Mike—and ask myself: Is what I'm doing good? *(Short pause)* The screenplay is brilliant.

MIKE: Thank you.

AL: I love how you totally divorced all the physical mutilation from any sense of reality. Very commercial.

MIKE: I'm flattered.

AL: There's just one problem.

MIKE: What?

AL: It's not the screenplay I asked for.

MIKE: But I thought—

AL: I know. You're a screenwriter. Forget thinking. Watch, study, imitate, *earn*. You're writing a screenplay. Screenplays are imitations of other screenplays. Like the law. Precedents. Cases decide cases. What worked once has to work again. Why? Because people in this business cannot be faced with one thing: thinking. Your script, I show it to these men, they have to think about it, they're going to get mad. So. What am I going to do?

MIKE: You're not going to show it to these men.

AL: Right.

MIKE: (*Pause*) But you think it's good.

AL: I think it's great.

MIKE: Then why can't we do it?

AL: Because it's good.

MIKE: (*Pause*) I don't—wait a minute. How can you be so sure it's so good it's no good?

AL: You transcended the genre.

MIKE: You said be creative.

AL: I didn't say violate the formula.

MIKE: I killed every person you said to kill.

AL: The material wanders. Mike—

MIKE: Seven dead the first ten minutes.

AL: Yes, but the pacing—

MIKE: The pacing's fine.

AL: Anyway, it's too cerebral.

MIKE: How would you know?

AL: (*Short pause*) If you talk down to the material, you can't write the material. You have to believe in it no matter how shitty it is. (*Beat*) Maybe you should think about do you want to be doing this.

MIKE: (*Pause*) I'd like to be paid.

AL: For what?

MIKE: The script.

AL: Impossible.

MIKE: You said when we had a first draft.

AL: I did. I said that.

MIKE: Then pay me.

AL: I can't.

MIKE: Why not?

AL: Because this is not the script I ordered. Mike, I order a pizza, no anchovies—

MIKE: I quit my job.

AL: (*Beat*) At the ad agency?

MIKE: No, as head of production at Paramount.

AL: But why? You want to get into movies. If someone came to me today and said, I want to make movies, I'd say, Then go into advertising. Besides, I thought you made good money.

MIKE: I made good small time money. You were talking good big time money.

AL: Mike, this was on spec.

MIKE: You said you had to have it right away, goddammit! (*Short pause*) I don't believe this. I don't believe I wrote a script's too brilliant for you to sell.

AL: Mike.

MIKE: I have to have it in three days, Mike. We'll get rich you do this right, Mike.

AL: There's that negative energy again. Already I feel it shutting down creative command-and-control centers that I thrive on. This one-track-mindedness about money is definitely holding you back as an artist. You should be looking at this as an opportunity, not as an end.

MIKE: I can't live on opportunity.

AL: But that's what life is—every day another opportunity. Every day another chance to create our lives on spec. Do you think I'm in this business for the money? Mike. I'm in it for the opportunities it provides me to become a more fully realized human being. Look at me. I'm forty-seven. I'm an attorney. But it's suffocating me on a creative, people-bonding level that I simply can no longer tolerate as I rapidly approach the grave. And I made that decision—a money decision—to become an attorney when I was your age. And now, due to an affection I feel toward you on a totally non-screenplay collaboration level, I don't want to see you make that same mistake. Money is a secondary concern. Life comes first. That's why you're

going to have to push aside your ego and your insecurity and answer the one question which will allow me to help you not make that same mistake. Michael. *(Beat)* Are you willing to do a rewrite?

Blackout.

SCENE FIVE

A health club. There is an exercise bike, a cross country skiing machine, and various free weights. Ted is on the bike when Al enters.

AL: Sorry I'm late. I have the *Virus* script. It's brilliant. It's beyond perfect even. I just want to do a quick polish before we—

TED: Forget polish.

AL: *Virus* . . . ?

TED: . . . is yesterday's lunch. We're dropping *Virus*.

AL: But we—

TED: —were offered another project. Real money, Al. Real money.

AL: *(Al throws script in wastebasket.)* I've forgotten *Virus*.

TED: Big money.

AL: I never even took a meeting on *Virus*.

TED: This is huge, Al. Monstrous.

AL: In this context, I'm happy to hear that, Ted.

TED: *(He stops pedalling.)* Money, though. What is it?

AL: A thing. A nice thing.

TED: A thing. Right. A tool. But why does money exist? To pay for things? No. It exists in order to create possibilities. Marxism. What is that? Some crackpot idea of utopia? Even Gorbachev knew it was fucked. It's an evil thing. You know it, I know it, we oppose it. Simply for political reasons? To an extent. But I'll tell you the real reason. Because it is a system which does not use money to create possibilities. Fiber optics, telescopes in space, twenty-four hour a day banking—

AL: Smart bombs.

TED: Exactly. For a safer world. Al, to see money being used simply to buy things . . . it makes me sick.

AL: So we're not doing this just for the money?

TED: No.

AL: Good. I feel better about myself already. (*Short pause, getting on ski machine.*) Can I ask you one thing though?

TED: Shoot.

AL: What are we doing?

TED: (*Short pause*) Al, we've worked together. We go back years.

AL: Lotta water under the bridge, Ted.

TED: We've put our heads together and made money other guys'd be filing Chapter Eleven.

AL: You have to have a vision.

TED: This thing, though . . .

AL: . . . Yeah? . . .

TED: This thing is something else entirely.

AL: (*Beat*) Good. I want to do something I don't know what the fuck I'm doing. You don't, you get stale.

TED: This thing, though. This thing, Al, changes the course of life as we know it.

AL: (*Short pause*) I'm sensing big numbers, Ted. Life-changing numbers.

TED: Nietzsche, Al. Nietzsche said, "Seek zeros." We sought. We fucking found. In spades.

AL: I think Nietzsche was talking other zeros, Ted.

TED: Well, this is the way I took it. This is a chance philosophy takes.

AL: (*Pause*) Can I ask—in terms of across the board ballpark type numbers—how much?

TED: (*Beat*) I shouldn't say it.

AL: Say it.

TED: Millions.

AL: Good numbers.

TED: Six zeros, one positive integer apiece in front of them.

AL: That's where positive integers should be, Ted.

TED: A shitload of money.

AL: If that's the way it has to come . . .

TED: Only one thing wrong with money, Al.

AL: This I haven't heard.

TED: You can't fuck it.

AL: Nothing's perfect, Ted.

TED: I find that hard to accept.

AL: Nevertheless.

TED: Can we have one sober moment here, though? One moment. What are we, Al? You're an attorney—

AL: —but I'm moving into the film business—

TED: —you're an attorney, I'm a banker, we make out all right. The idealism of our youth tempered by—what? War, disillusionment, defeat . . .

AL: . . . baseball free agency . . .

TED: I'm not discounting that. The heroes are gone, Al. Bobby and JFK are in heaven. Ted Williams is fishing in Nova Scotia. Albert Schweitzer's history. It's all money today. *(Beat)* I made six hundred thousand last year. How much did you make?

AL: Seven.

TED: *(Short pause)* I'm happy, Al. I'm happy for you. I'm happy for us. *(Beat)* Yet, in spite of what we earn, what are we?

AL: Meaningless.

TED: We're not in college, Al. Small. We are still small men. Why? Because we have the money, but we haven't had the glory. You want the glory, you have to take risks.

AL: We're being asked to take risks, Ted?

TED: We're being asked to have faith, Al.

AL: In the project.

TED: In the project. And in ourselves.

AL: *(Beat)* Who's doing the asking, Ted?

TED: Men.

AL: Are we talking multinationals?

TED: That wouldn't be a you're-getting-cold type of answer.

AL: Cartel?

TED: In the sense that we're talking political groups united in a common cause, I could say, uh-huh. *(Ted has climbed back onto the exercise bike. Al comes off the ski machine.)*

AL: So is this an axe-to-grind political thing, interest groups trying to spread a little propaganda in a PBS-style documentary project, tanks roaming city streets in a war-torn capital, the Gregory Peck type narrator voicing over reports on crops and land nationalization, a whole ninety minute apologia type thing with white credits over a black screen and no theme music . . . ?

TED: It's an action picture, Al.

AL: *(Beat)* You want me to produce an action flick?

TED: That's the idea.

AL: Something Ramboesque?

TED: I'd pull back on the archetypal jingoism.

AL: So more of a high-tech, state-of-the-art, Nam payback revenge fantasy vehicle.

TED: Desert Storm took care of that. Keep it relevant. Money has no use for history.

AL: A Poland, Soviet satellite, neo-Stalinist regression type scene?

TED: Cold war vibes. Too fifties.

AL: A Central America kind of thing?

TED: Al, half the fucking white world don't know who's who down there. Rice, beans, poverty, coups. It's like some kind of Abstract Expressionist political situation. Let's keep it simple.

AL: Can I say something, Ted?

TED: What?

AL: We're running out of trouble spots.

TED: (*Ted stops exercising.*) It's not a trouble spot, Al. It doesn't have to be identified as a trouble spot. (*Beat*) Let's just say there's a . . . situation.

AL: A situation.

TED: Right. A situation that the man, the generous man, who is putting all of his faith in us to the tune of *fifteen* million American is more or less —in.

AL: (*Short pause*) What type of situation is it, Ted?

TED: (*Short pause*) A high-concept synopsis? A man has been exiled from his home by a brutal, Marxist-friendly dictatorship. And now, the only way he can regain it is if we help.

AL: By making an action movie.

TED: Yes.

AL: (*Beat*) Do we have to deliver a strong political message?

TED: I think that would basically be run-off. The deal's a money deal. But, yes, I think some people should get the message.

AL: Which is?

TED: Elect our guy or else.

AL: (*Short pause*) Do we have a scenario?

TED: In a word, absolutely.

AL: What's the pitch?

TED: A charismatic leader overthrows a puppet government with a bunch of ragtag freedom fighters and restores peace and democracy to a troubled and crucial region in the Third World. *(Beat)* I'm thinking Memorial Day, wide release, have it on video by Christmas.

AL: Do we have a distributor lined up?

TED: That's a down-the-road piece of the puzzle, and something on which I am counting on you for help.

AL: Where are we shooting this thing?

TED: *(Beat)* I'd like to leave that till later.

AL: *(Short pause)* We aren't going to be anyplace we aren't supposed to be, are we?

TED: Al, being where we aren't supposed to be is the spine of American foreign policy.

AL: Are you saying we have political support on this?

TED: If we needed it, it could be brought in. But we don't need it.

AL: How hot is this area, Ted?

TED: It's a page five item. Very low priority.

AL: War-torn country?

TED: There's strife.

AL: Elections?

TED: Why burden the people.

AL: Press blackouts?

TED: None that I've read about.

AL: Are we talking flight capital?

TED: I'd say there's some money'd like to grow wings.

AL: This is not any kind of CIA let's-topple-a-government-and-see-what-happens type of deal, is it, Ted?

TED: It's a chance to close our eyes and quadruple our incomes, Al.

AL: Then this is definitely not an altruistic thing.

TED: Name one thing that is.

AL: *(Pause)* This doesn't sound kosher.

TED: It's kosher, Al. It's kosheroonie all the way. *(Short pause)* And besides, we're supposed to pretend that we don't know.

AL: Don't know what?

TED: Whatever it is we know.

AL: What do we know?

TED: I don't know.

AL: *(Beat)* Ted, if we're working where I'd hate to think we'd be working, the only thing I can say is, we're not supposed to be working there.

TED: We're not supposed to be handed *twenty percent* of the gross budget either—

AL: Twenty percent. That's three million.

TED: —which I am splitting like a cantaloup down the middle with you— *plus* beachfront real estate for putting together a “B” movie action flick. Things do not work the way they're supposed to work, Al. There are no rewards for good behavior. There's only luck, and pillage. One you buy a lottery ticket go home and kiss your rosary beads, the other you *act* on.

AL: *(Beat)* People are dying in the streets there, Ted.

TED: People are dying in the streets here! You going to tell me you don't step over some guy looks like a pile of laundry in your office doorway every morning. This is a difficult thing to say, but fuck everybody else. Nothing matters, everything sucks, everyone's going to die. Fine. In the meantime, let me make some money.

AL: *(Pause)* You have no qualms about this project.

TED: No. This is the benefit of a morally bankrupt society. It stimulates free enterprise because we never have to stop and ask, "Is this wrong?" *(Beat)* I hate to be this way, Al, but you leave people with their self-respect intact, they fuck you. *(Beat)* So. Are you in on this thing or not?

AL: *(Short pause)* I get to direct?

TED: *(Half-beat)* I can say yes to that.

AL: I've always wanted to direct.

TED: Then you're in. Here's the outline. *(Ted pulls an envelope from his gym bag and hands it to Al. Al takes the envelope.)* The script fee comes out of your cut. We need a script in two days. *(Beat)*

Blackout.

SCENE SIX

Al's office. Al still wears his gym suit, and wipes perspiration from his face with a towel. Lights up.

MIKE: No! *(Beat)* Where? No. Absolutely not. You have any idea—

AL: I know.

MIKE: We are forbidden—

AL: Discouraged. Not forbidden.

MIKE: Forbidden. (*Beat*) I won't write it.

AL: (*Short pause*) Then what was all that talk about wanting to be a screenwriter?

MIKE: That was not this project.

AL: This project is what screenwriting is all about. A situation develops, you strike. It's like prospecting. Don't keep confusing it with a legitimate trade.

MIKE: You're not going to talk me into it.

AL: Do you realize how many people you'd be giving jobs to?

MIKE: You're not going to talk me into it.

AL: (*Short pause*) Fine. Be idealistic. Throw ethics in my face. (I won't even mention our friendship.) But let me suggest something. All the liberal posturing in the world isn't going to change a thing. You know what changes things?

MIKE: Bullets.

AL: (*Beat*) Well, that's true. I didn't expect you to have a good answer. But do you really believe that boycotting this country over human rights is going to make the regime in power turn around and say, OK, you win. We can't take you shunning us. Mike. Think. Who advocates the boycott? Rock stars. Kids who don't know Columbus discovered America because they were too busy shredding their clothes to open a history book. Entertainers, Mike. Actors. Movie stars. Evangelists. The shallowest people on earth. (*Beat*) Money. Money changes things.

MIKE: I thought money was secondary.

AL: Only if the sums involved are too small to abandon principles for.

MIKE: Oh, so I'm supposed to "sell out" now because the money's too good?

AL: "Sell out?" What is this negative topspin you're putting on it all of a sudden? Your whole generation's been looking to sell out since the first grade. (*Half beat*) Mike, think. I'm offering you a chance to make a bundle—legally. That's an almost unheard of situation. No papers to shred. No secretary to bang and pay off later. No Congressional investigation gig to put on a suit and tie for. That's selling out? Let me tell you something. People, grown people, would stand in line *to kill* to be you. Just do this one thing—for yourself. Write the screenplay.

MIKE: (*Pause*) What's my fee?

AL: (*Beat*) I can get you one percent of the gross budget.

MIKE: What's the budget?

AL: Small, Mike. Very small.

MIKE: I thought you said this was big, huge?

AL: Only in terms of real dollars, not movie money. (*Beat*) Five million.

MIKE: I'd get . . . fifty thousand . . . ?

AL: It's the best I could do. And I fought for every penny.

MIKE: When do I get paid?

AL: I can give you a thousand now, the rest as we go . . . maybe a little longer.

MIKE: When is it due?

AL: This is the last Wednesday of the month?

MIKE: Yes.

AL: Friday.

MIKE: Two days!

AL: You're out of work. What else do you have to do?

MIKE: What if it's only half done in two days?

AL: So, I'll stop payment on only half your check. Don't worry. It's only a deadline. Everyone knows they're gonna get broken.

MIKE: (*Short pause*) One question. Why me?

AL: (*Short pause*) Because they loved the *Virus* script.

MIKE: They did?

AL: They said, "Al, get this guy."

MIKE: But I thought you weren't going to show it to them.

AL: It was too good not to show it to them.

MIKE: But I thought it was too good to do.

AL: That's what they thought, too.

MIKE: So they're not doing it.

AL: No.

MIKE: Which is what you said.

AL: Right.

MIKE: So, why me?

AL: (*Half beat*) Because I convinced them that although the script was too good to do, it was still not too good not to notice how good the script was. (*Beat*) Besides, you're like a son to me. (*Beat*)

Blackout.

SCENE SEVEN

An airfield hangar. HICKS, dressed in a flight suit, is tinkering with an engine part. Lights up.

BROWNER: Let's say we could make your legal problems disappear.

HICKS: Permanently?

BROWNER: I can't give you *carte blanche* to follow the yellow brick road in the future. But I can cook up a little let-by-gones-be-by-gones type of arrangement to deal with your present situation.

HICKS: What's it going to cost me?

BROWNER: Less than your sister charges. (*Short pause. Hicks glares at Browner.*) In return for doing upwards of six years in, oh, say, Raiford? Well, what if I told you that you stand to make—depending on how ambitious you are, and you are ambitious, in an unhinged sort of way—somewhere in the neighborhood of four runs a month at three hundred thousand a run? Not bad. A little over a mil a month. Less expenses, of course.

HICKS: What expenses? Kickbacks to some pinched-dick Congressman?

BROWNER: Hicks, this jaundiced overview reeks of liberal journalism. (*Short pause*) You want a quick P & L sheet? Alright. You've got planes, yours, to supply. What do you run? A couple of DC-6s, a few DC-3s, right? Then you've got insurance and the usual maintenance and garaging stuff—we don't cover any of the incidentals. Add in bribes to petty officials. Gas and tolls. That's it. (*Beat*) Oh, and you will be donating two hundred fifty thou a month to the cause.

HICKS: And you're the cause.

BROWNER: What are you complaining about? I have to make a little something. And you stay out of prison, work a part-time job, and net six hundred grand a month. That's not exactly minimum wage.

HICKS: (*Pause*) What's the cargo?

BROWNER: (*Beat*) Outbound—

HICKS: Outbound is where?

BROWNER: Here to there.

HICKS: And?

BROWNER: The freight is weapons.

HICKS: I'm shocked. What? Lightweight?

BROWNER: M-60s—

HICKS: C-4 explosives, right. The whole do-it-yourself guerilla revolution kit. Where's the drop?

BROWNER: A ranch up in the mountains. Our boy.

HICKS: How long's the strip?

BROWNER: I don't know. Eighteen hundred feet.

HICKS: That's like landing in a fucking jockstrap. Who's your boy?

BROWNER: Gary Westover.

HICKS: Gary. He used to fly for me. Delivered six mines to Ilopango for you guys back in '83 when you were into that harbor mining shit.

BROWNER: We remember.

HICKS: Had a nice payload coming back. Twenty-five thousand pounds, Colombian.

BROWNER: We know. He's got a ranch in the southern part of the country, about fifty miles from the perimeter. He coordinates a group called the Southern Democratic Front.

HICKS: (*Hicks takes a rag and begins wiping grease off his hands.*) That's original.

BROWNER: (*Beat*) Gary's people will off-load the planes when you get there. You don't have to touch a thing.

HICKS: Just like the teamsters. So. You load me up here, I haul it down my expense, shell out two hundred and fifty grand a month out of the mil and change you pay me, pass go, and stay out of jail. That the shot?

BROWNER: (*Short pause*) We don't *pay* you anything. (*Beat*) We create opportunities for you.

HICKS: (*Beat*) Opportunities.

BROWNER: Possibilities. Hicks. You're going to fly all the way down there full. You going to come back empty? (*Beat*) That doesn't seem very cost effective. (*Beat*) We can offer you a package. (*Beat*) You pick up a load, fly it down to us, go lie on a beach get some sun. Two days later you get back behind the wheel with another load, fly home, we collect the return load.

HICKS: (*Pause*) Where's home?

BROWNER: (*Beat*) Homestead.

HICKS: Air Force Base? (*Browner nods, Short pause.*) How high up are you cleared on this thing?

BROWNER: We've got an OK from the top down . . . as long as we're discreet, and turn a profit.

HICKS: (*Short pause*) How am I coming in?

BROWNER: We'll give you a discrete transponder code to start beeping two hours outside of home.

HICKS: (*Beat*) What's my average payload coming back?

BROWNER: Four hundred kilos. Any pot will be small change. *(Pause. Hicks takes a pocket calculator off his work bench and punches in some numbers.)*

HICKS: That's twenty-eight million a month. A mil a month isn't exactly an even-Steven type arrangement.

BROWNER: You're doing it for God and country, Frankie.

HICKS: I'll take two million, clear.

BROWNER: Frankie. We've got a war to fight. Revolutionaries to feed, propaganda to distribute, Senators to pay off.

HICKS: Plus all the cash you and your friends have to skim off the top.

BROWNER: I figured that in already.

HICKS: *(Short pause)* Give me a one-for-one customs clearance deal on any other project I initiate.

BROWNER: You mean for each flight you bring in for us, we give you a guest pass for your own moonlighting shifts.

HICKS: Right.

BROWNER: *(Beat)* You got it.

HICKS: And that drug thing gets dropped, pronto. No Raiford, no grand jury indictments.

BROWNER: That's the deal.

HICKS: *(Beat)* I'm in.

BROWNER: Good. *(Browner begins to head for the door.)* You'll be aiding and abetting the spread of democracy, Frankie.

HICKS: That's why I'm doing it.

BROWNER: (*Browner stops in the doorway and turns.*) Oh, Hicks. One other thing. You're going to be carrying some cans of film back with you. Do us a favor. (*Beat*) Burn 'em.

Browner exits. Blackout.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

A tent in a desert. Lights down. The sound of gunfire. An explosion followed by a flashing white light. The explosion fades, light dies away.

AL: (*Offstage*) And, cut!

Lights up. The inside of the tent: guns and film equipment are strewn around the tent in the corners. There is a table with a short-wave radio on it. There is a map on one of the tent's walls. A second table with two director's chairs. Browner is seated at the second table, looking through papers.

AL: (*Still off*) Murray, Fred. Thanks. Beautiful job. Working on levels I can't even comprehend. You're gonna make me famous. Eddie, you want to help Barry light that next set-up? (*Al enters and sees Browner.*) Peter, I'm glad to see you. There are some technical questions—

BROWNER: Who was fucking with these papers?

AL: They may have become mixed in with a draft of the script, we're a little cramped for space. Why, is anything shreddable or classified missing?

BROWNER: What's missing or not missing is none of your fucking business. Your job at the moment is to tell me who touched my papers and my goddamned radio.

AL: No one that I know of.

BROWNER: I'm going to start holding the person nearest me personally fucking responsible I don't get some answers.

AL: I'm not volunteering any names, but my guess would be Mike.

BROWNER: Who's Mike?

AL: The screenwriter. Nice kid. Very 80s, very patriotic. (*Browner goes to wastebasket and begins shredding papers.*) Is anything wrong?

BROWNER: What would you know about wrong?

AL: Nothing.

BROWNER: Nothing. Right.

AL: (*Beat*) Listen, Peter. I'm sure nothing was touched by any sort of screenwriter-cum-intelligence type person.

BROWNER: For your sake, you'd better hope so. Understood?

AL: Absolutely. I'm totally behind giving the military free rein in matters of supposed national security. (*Browner stops shredding papers and begins loading his guns. Al watches.*) But technically, about steel rain—

BROWNER: Listen, Arnie—

AL: Al.

BROWNER: Listen to me. Stick to the simple stuff. Anybody can do hardware. That's not the mark of a good film. Story, Arnie.

AL: Al.

BROWNER: Story. All the great kick-ass war chronicles: *The Iliad*, Thucydides, Oliver Stone. What did they have?

AL: (*Beat*) Sex and death?

BROWNER: Good stories. Leave the hardware to the guys in the helmets. OK? (*Al nods.*) Good. And if I catch anybody near my shit again, I'm going to use his chin for a mine probe.

AL: That shouldn't be necessary. But, in the meantime, about some additional funds—

BROWNER: The money'll be here when it's here. You have money problems, straighten them out with Ted.

AL: And Hicks, with the film?

BROWNER: I'm not your personal fucking secretary, pal.

AL: Al.

BROWNER: When your name comes up on Hicks' schedule, you'll see your film.

AL: But—(*Mike enters.*) Scott!

MIKE: (*Puzzled*) What? (*He exchanges confused looks with Browner, who exits.*) Who's Scott?

AL: The American pilot. We should call him Scott.

MIKE: Are you all right?

AL: I'm fine. I think it's just the heat. (*Al puts down his script and begins washing his hands in a basin.*)

MIKE: Barry says we got some good footage on the last scene.

AL: We did? We did. Good. Did he get a close-up of the camouflage pattern on Murray's uniform?

MIKE: Got it.

AL: Good. I want to use it in a dissolve. (*Al finishes drying his hands with a towel.*) We get some stock jungle footage. You know, Rousseau-sized

leaves, the obscene screech of birds type thing. Splice that in with our stuff. Then dissolve onto Murray's uniform, pan up to this gaping, blood-soaked wound in his chest. Do you get the blood/earth imagery? The horror of war thing?

MIKE: Got it.

AL: Good. Then cut to a full close-up of Murray, lifeless. Reverse zoom, one-quarter speed . . . fade to black. You like it?

MIKE: Absolutely.

AL: I just this minute stole it from *Psycho*. The eyeball/drain dissolve in the shower scene. Very effective. The only thing I'm worried about is whether it'll play to the people we fly over. Too esoteric?

MIKE: They've seen *Platoon*.

AL: That's very true. But the script, the script. What I'd like to get into it, what I think the script is missing—and I'm not saying that, as is, the script is anything shy of genius; Robert Towne would abase himself before it—nevertheless, I think we may be missing an opportunity here. After all, Mike, what's important is—

MIKE: Sex and death.

AL: Story. (*Beat*) The main character, for instance. What about his sense of mortality? Think about the huge leap into abstraction he's made in terms of killing seven hundred and fifty extras.

MIKE: So you want some kind of God-is-on-our-side, fling-yourself-into-battle speech?

AL: (*Beat*) Too Islamic. Still, we need to see his other side.

MIKE: You want him to have depth?

AL: Exactly. Depth.

MIKE: You told me high body count.

AL: Yes, but there should be a moral underpinning to the slaughter.

MIKE: You want poignant-tank-crash footage?

AL: I want death to have power again.

MIKE: *(Beat)* Doesn't sound commercial.

AL: What? *The Godfather* wasn't commercial? Sonny on the causeway? Fredo, hapless Fredo saying a Hail Mary in the rowboat wasn't commercial? Buck Barrow in a field on his knees, half his skull blown away. Clyde and Bonnie, that last look, that pause, when they knew? Charley Malloy on a meat hook in his cashmere coat, Brando stumbling down the alleyway, crying he was gonna take it out on their skulls? George Bailey, *It's a Wonderful Life*? George Bailey finding out he's alive when Bert recognizes him. George Bailey's depth and sense of mortality wasn't commercial?

MIKE: *(Beat)* I'm not transcending any genres unless I'm paid in advance.

AL: I'm not asking you to transcend genres. We don't have genre-transcending capacities here, anyway. All I'm asking is—give me depth, give me compassion, give me a cathartic experience of our own mortality. *(Half beat)* What's our next scene?

MIKE: We sacrifice a virgin at the stake. *(Ted bursts in, waving a piece of paper.)*

TED: Al!

AL: Ted.

TED: When I said produce-direct I did not give you license to take on a debt the size of the S & L bailout. Can I ask you something? What is this? *(Al takes the sheet of paper from Ted. Ted glares at Mike.)*

AL: Mike go tell the virgin to take most of her clothes off. *(Mike slinks out of the tent.)*

TED: *(Beat)* Well?

AL: It's a bill.

TED: A bill.

AL: An invoice, Ted. Things people give other people when they owe them money. Says right here in the corner: Invoice.

TED: For seven thousand dollars! To fly one—what? (*Ted tears the paper from AL's hand.*) One *box* to L.A. What happened? You forget your wife's birthday? You forget they invented such a thing as *stamps*?! What, please tell me before my ulcer starts spray-painting my intestines with blood, is so important that you spend almost the price of a decent watch to get delivered A.S.A.P. to L.A. by jumbo jet?

AL: Film. Film, Ted. The thing we're making.

TED: You've got a pilot who takes the film to L.A. and back every week.

AL: I haven't seen Hicks for two weeks, Ted. Two weeks ago I gave him thirteen days worth of film. Since then, in return, I have gotten dick. This thing is going to look like a *Soldier of Fortune* home movie if I don't get to see some dailies.

TED: You haven't seen Hicks for two weeks?

AL: Since he dropped you down south I haven't seen as much as an Instamatic snapshot from Hicks.

TED: So that explains this. (*Ted holds up the invoice.*)

AL: Yes.

TED: So you have the new film?

AL: No.

Ted: Well where is it?

AL: I don't know.

TED: For seven thousand dollars you don't know?

AL: Seven thousand dollars is a relative figure, Ted. Why are you suddenly bandying it about as if it were an absolute?

TED: Did you try the lab? Maybe there's a mix-up?

AL: I can't reach the lab. God forbid they have a phone in working order in this country.

TED: The phones are out?

AL: The phones are out.

TED: Since when?

AL: Since before we shot the decapitation scene. I didn't run off for two weeks, Ted, leave someone else holding the bag. This is like running a day care center for mercenaries.

TED: What do you want from my life? You get an animal takes a dump in the road here you've got a traffic jam for a week. Civilization is not a burden to this place yet. All right? Crucify me. I was not on R and R. I was looking into some very attractive real estate for *us*. You put democracy, cheap labor, and beaches together, you get resorts. Excuse me for being visionary. I'm trying to make *us* a living. The phones are out, the phones are out. In the meantime, we work with what we've got. *(Beat)* What have we got?

AL: Dick.

TED: Then that's what we'll work with. *(Ted paces. Short pause.)* Who knows? Maybe things will loosen up with this cease-fire agreement.

AL: That happens today?

TED: That's what they say.

AL: Have you seen any sign of it?

TED: No.

AL: You think it could be why we have no phones?

TED: I don't know. The U.N.'s coming. That's all I know. *(Beat)* Maybe Browner knows. Have you seen him?

AL: He was here right after we killed Murray and Fred.

TED: Did he say anything?

AL: Was he supposed to say anything?

TED: About what?

AL: You asked me. *(Beat)* Why? Do you know anything?

TED: About more than what we already don't know?

AL: Yes.

TED: No. *(Ted takes a bottle of Maalox from his pocket and takes a slug from it.)*

AL: *(Beat)* You're giving me a bad feeling, Ted.

TED: It's just nerves. Forget it. *(Beat)* Browner mention money?

AL: You mean as in giving us any?

TED: Yes.

AL: No. He said it'll be here when it's here, and to talk to you.

TED: Whatever I have comes through Browner.

AL: I'm just repeating what he said. *(Beat)* You think something's up?

TED: Would you disburse money you didn't absolutely have to? He's probably picking up five grand a day in interest from Deutschebank on what he's holding back.

AL: *(Short pause)* What interest rate are you figuring at? Because—

TED: I'm just throwing out a round figure. Here, you want to put the handcuffs on me, you think I'm stealing from you?

AL: I don't think anybody's stealing, Ted. I'm just worried about cash flow. We've only seen two million of the fifteen, and that's almost gone.

TED: Well, then we're going to have to stop sending seven thousand dollar boxes to L.A. until we get liquid again. I'm not angry, Al. I apologize for yelling before. But you have to stop handing out money like some commercial loan officer. This is not a pre-fab-a-community-in-the-foothills project. American taxpayers are not going to be forced into bailing us out if we don't deliver. Don't blow this thing. *(Beat)* Let's just finish it and get out.

AL: We still have three more weeks of shooting, Ted. Why are you talking about pulling the plug?

TED: I'm just getting antsy. I didn't like some of the things I was seeing down south.

AL: What? Unrest? Effigies burning?

TED: Let's just say I didn't seem to be a welcome presence.

AL: You don't exactly look like a native, Ted.

TED: That doesn't mean they have the right to get in my face about it.

AL: You were hurt?

TED: No. But they surrounded the car. I thought the driver was going to get out and leave me sitting there.

AL: Sort of a Michael Corleone, Havana-limo-ride scene.

TED: I'm talking spitting, Al.

AL: It's getting tough to be white, American, and abroad, Ted.

TED: That's why I'd like to get back to where my tax dollars are paying the police force.

AL: Your tax dollars are paying the police force here, Ted.

TED: Well, they're not making me feel safe.

AL: You're investing too much ego in it. It was probably a spontaneous, knee-jerk anti-American type reaction. Doesn't even merit consideration.

Mike reenters the tent quickly.

MIKE: Al, you'd better come.

AL: What is it?

MIKE: They're not letting Eddie light the next set-up.

AL: Who's not letting him?

TED: Wait a minute, Al. Mike, who's not letting him?

AL: Ted, please. I am having a conversation with an underling here. Now Mike, who? Browner's people?

TED: Browner's people all pulled back because of the cease fire.

MIKE: What do you mean, pulled back?

AL: It's a producer's term. Don't concern yourself with it. *(To Ted)* I'm just covering bases here, Ted. *(Back to Mike)* Now Mike, were they Browner's people?

MIKE: No. They're not Browner's people.

AL: Good. We've established that.

TED: You're brilliant, Al. Mike, just tell us who.

MIKE: I don't know. Troops. I haven't seen these guys before.

TED: Troops. We're twenty miles from troops.

AL: Don't say troops, Mike. We don't know anything about troops.

TED: What did they do, drop out of the sky?

MIKE: Yeah.

AL: (*Short pause*) Mike, this film is over budget. We do not make jokes.

TED: You'll be writing copy for dog food you keep it up, kid.

AL: We do not have a joking type of atmosphere here, Mike. We are in your basic siege mentality mode. Do you understand?

TED: (*Ted goes to the tent door with a pair of binoculars.*) I am not in the mood for kidding. I just spent four hours riding in a Jeep. My kidneys feel like they've been pounded with a sledgehammer.

MIKE: I'm not kidding.

TED: (*Ted peers through the tent door and looks up.*) He's not kidding.

AL: How can he not be kidding? (*Al goes to the tent door, looks out and up.*) He's not kidding.

TED: What is this?

AL: Somebody making a movie around here we don't know about?

TED: Where's Browner? (*Ted walks back to the center of the tent, while Al remains at the door.*)

AL: This whole scene has a real World War II look to it. The scrub plain, the slate grey sky, the white mushroom cap chutes.

TED: I want to get Browner in here and find out what's going on.

MIKE: One of the guys pulled a gun on Eddie when Eddie told him to fuck off.

TED: Eddie should be careful. He's not with the teamsters. Where is this guy? (*Ted rejoins Mike and Al at the tent door. Mike points.*)

MIKE: They were over there a minute ago.

AL: (*Al checks his movie script. Beat.*) Maybe this is a scene I'm shooting.

TED: Al, we do not have a parachuting scene in the movie. Parachuting went out with Dana Andrews.

AL: (*Al looks through the tent door again.*) It's such a great look, though.

TED: Mike, do you see anyone on the ground out there threatening anyone?

MIKE: No.

TED: Yet you claim you saw them.

MIKE: Yes.

TED: (*Beat*) Kid, I told you. No drugs. You want to play Jim Morrison, see things falling out of the sky, stay in L.A.

MIKE: Ted, I'm not stoned. You saw them yourself. Uh-oh. Look. (*Ted turns.*) There are more of them pulling up in trucks by the lunch tent.

AL: Those look like Cassipir troop transports. I wonder where they got those.

TED: Maybe they own them, Al!

MIKE: You believe me now?

TED: Maybe. (*They watch a moment.*)

MIKE: Are they ours?

TED: We don't have an ours here, kid. Can't you get that?

MIKE: Al, what's he talking about?

AL: (*Al continues to look out the tent flap, as Ted turns away.*) We're over budget. It's hysteria. Ignore it.

TED: It is not hysteria. We are one big collective *persona non grata* on this thing. Anything happens, we're here, we were never here. Understood? We are not protected by the good hands people.

AL: Those are very authentic looking. You figure it could be one of the studios?

TED: I don't intend to ask them. I want to talk to Browner. (*Ted goes to the short-wave radio and begins fumbling with it. Mike stands beside Al at the tent door.*)

MIKE: What do you think is going on?

AL: It could be the cease fire agreement taking place.

MIKE: With guns?

AL: To insure that it's peaceful. How else?

MIKE: (*Beat*) We're not doing anything we're not supposed to be doing, are we?

AL: Financially, no.

MIKE: This isn't political, is it?

AL: Movies are the wet dreams of capitalism. They're political by nature.

MIKE: So this is just a movie then?

AL: In a very direct manner of speaking, my guess would be yes.

MIKE: Al, are you telling me the truth?

AL: Whenever I think it won't upset you, always.

TED: (*Ted is still flipping switches on the radio with no success.*) Where the hell is Browner? Al, would you please come over here and tell me how the hell you work this thing?

AL: Browner said not to touch that, Ted.

TED: Browner's a megalomaniac with a small dick. Just come over here and show me how to work this.

AL: (*Al crosses to the radio, studies it a moment, flips a switch.*) Try turning it on, Ted.

MIKE: (*Mike crosses to Al.*) Aren't you going to help Eddie?

TED: Eddie's on salary. Let him take care of himself.

AL: He's right. I'd be emasculating him if I stepped in.

MIKE: But they had guns.

AL: Eddie's worked with guns before. (*Ted is still having no success with the radio.*)

TED: (*Into mike*) If somebody's there, just pick up. (*No answer. Ted throws down the mike and turns to Al.*) Al, work this fucking thing for me, please. I can't handle a machine doesn't have a "hold" button. Where the hell did Browner say he'd be, anyway?

AL: He didn't.

MIKE: I heard him talking to that Nthodi character this morning.

TED: You mean the guy with the state trooper shades looks like he fucks bulls?

MIKE: Yeah, him. They were talking about going up to the perimeter.

TED: (*To Al*) The perimeter? I thought that was hands off with this cease-fire thing.

AL: What are you asking me for? Ask the U.N. (*Loud whoosh and roar as a helicopter passes by low overhead.*)

TED: Al, this is no longer copacetic. Get somebody on that thing.

AL: What do you want me to do, call 911? (*Sharp crack of gunfire outside the tent. Pause. Ted, Al, and Mike freeze.*) Mike. Go see what that was.

TED: (*Beat*) Do what he says, Mike. (*Short pause*) Stick your head out the door, kid, or your check'll bounce from here to Canada.

MIKE: (*Mike goes to the door with the binoculars. Beat.*) Oh, shit.

AL: What is it, Mike?

TED: Mike, what is it?

AL: Can we use it in the movie?

MIKE: Oh, shit.

AL: Don't panic. It's not that bad. Nothing can be that bad. We're Americans.

MIKE: They shot somebody.

AL: Who?

TED: Was he on payroll?

MIKE: One of those guys. It looks like he shot a native kid. They've got about a dozen of them up against a transport.

TED: Oh, fuck! Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!

AL: You're an MBA, Ted. Get a grip.

TED: They wasted a twenty-year-old native kid on the set. Are you kidding me, get a grip? The death squad is personally going to burn my house down.

AL: Nobody is going to burn anybody's house down, Ted.

TED: You couldn't use SAG people and make-up. You had to have real natives.

AL: I wanted a quality look.

TED: And because you wanted a quality look I'm dead. *(Ted stops pacing.)* You think our insurance covers this?

AL: I think we'd be into an act-of-war, loophole type clause here.

TED: But there's a cease fire in effect.

AL: That's a loophole could be to our advantage. I'll have to look into it.

TED: Well, before you start looking, get Browner on this thing. *(Ted indicates the short-wave. Al fumbles with it, gets a loud buzzing sound.)*

AL: I can't get Browner. All I get is something that sounds like an electric razor.

TED: You think they cut us off?

AL: I think it's best not to think about it. Let's deal with the here and now.

TED: Here and now our radio is not working.

AL: Ted, we live in a Godless universe. I can deal without a radio. *(Another helicopter whooshes by overhead. Ted turns to Mike, who has continued to look out through the tent door.)*

TED: Mike, what are they doing?

MIKE: It looks like they're interrogating that guy. *(Ted and Al join Mike at the tent door.)*

TED: What guy?

MIKE: That one there, on the end.

AL: Don't worry. He had a non-speaking part. He hasn't even seen the script.

TED: Great, Al. Our story is safe!

AL: Don't get hysterical, Ted.

TED: I'm not a kid out of ROTC in Nam anymore, Al. I earn six figures a year. I have the right to get hysterical.

MIKE: Look at this guy stepping in.

TED: *(Ted looks.)* He looks like he'd skin his mother to make cheesecloth.

AL: What a great type. *(Pause. They watch.)*

TED: Jesus Christ!

MIKE: Oh, shit.

TED: He broke his jaw. He broke the fucking kid's jaw. *(Ted crosses to center of tent.)*

AL: Where's Barry? I wonder if Barry is getting any of this?

TED: Why, Al? So we can sell it to Ted Koppel, he can expose us for the money-hungry slime we are on national TV?

AL: This is history, Ted.

TED: History is something we forget and repeat, Al. This is a *Newsweek* cover. *(Ted looks around and sees his briefcase. Beat.)* I'm out of here.

As Ted moves to pick up his briefcase, there is a whistling sound, followed by an explosion. Dust and smoke pour in through the tent door. Al, Ted, and Mike dive to the floor. Gunfire begins to swell in the distance. It starts out faintly, and subtly, and increases throughout the rest of the act. The smoke clears. Ted, Al, and Mike are clinging to the ground.

TED: *(Pause)* Now I'm pissed. Al—

AL: I know, Ted.

TED: Browner swore to me.

AL: Browner's C.I.A. What's he know?

MIKE: *(Mike lifts his head.)* Browner's C.I.A.? What the—

AL: *(Al pushes Mike's head back down to the floor.)* He's with us on a consulting basis. It's typical of all action films. Not to worry.

MIKE: Al, you promised me.

TED: Mike, what are you to this film?

MIKE: The writer.

TED: Right. A peon. So shut the fuck up.

Loud, swift pass overhead by a helicopter. Machine gun bullets are heard strafing the ground just outside the tent, then suddenly they burst through the tent wall, shredding the map as they enter. Ted, Al, and Mike cover their heads. Quiet. Pause. They lift their heads.

AL: God, if we had a phone we could call CNN.

MIKE: Al . . .

AL: I lied. OK? I lied.

MIKE: How could you do that?

AL: What do you mean, how could I do that? Mike, I'm an attorney.

More sound of strafing. Browner bursts into the tent. He carries a lightweight machine gun. Ted jumps to his feet. Al and Mike follow.

TED: Petey.

BROWNER: *(He walks right past Ted to the short-wave.)* Fucking cocksucking sons of bitches!

TED: Petey!

BROWNER: (*Trying to get the radio to work.*) You'd think one of them would pull his head far enough out of his asshole just once to be able to analyze a recon report!

TED: Pete!

AL: He's obviously distracted, Ted.

TED: Petey!

BROWNER: (*He smacks the short-wave radio.*) Who's been fucking with this thing? Georgie Porgie. Georgie Porgie, this is Puddin' Pie. Do you read? (*Silence. Then a buzzing like an electric razor. He smacks the radio again.*) Some fucking peace dividend. Shit!

AL: We had the same problem.

BROWNER: You touched my radio?

TED: PETEY!

BROWNER: What?!

TED: What the fuck is going on?

BROWNER: Didn't you see all the parachutes, Ted? We're having a white sale? What the hell do you think?

TED: You promised me, Petey. You swore to me.

MIKE: Who swore what?

AL: Financing, Mike. It's money talk.

TED: You promised me no offensive while I was in the area.

AL: We, Ted. We.

BROWNER: They're dropping out of the sky on *us*, Ted. Does this look like I started an offensive?

MIKE: What offensive?

AL: The climactic battle scene. Very difficult to coordinate.

MIKE: Al, I don't like this.

AL: There's a phase in every creative process where the artist hates his own work. It's natural.

MIKE: I have a girlfriend!

AL: That's nice. What's she do?

MIKE: Actress-waitress.

AL: Well, if anything happens, I'm sure she'll get thirty seconds to weep on the evening news. It could be a very good career move.

BROWNER: (*He has been working on the radio with Ted looking over his shoulder, and tries it again.*) Georgie Porgie, Georgie Porgie, this is Puddin' Pie. Do you read? (*Beat*) Dammit!

TED: This is how I almost bought it last time, Browner. You incompetent.

BROWNER: You almost bought it, Ted, because you were so busy trying to save your ass you didn't realize you were retreating in the wrong direction.

TED: At least I didn't lead us into a firefight thirty clicks from base.

BROWNER: Piss off, Ted.

AL: (*To Mike*) Does anyone say clicks in our script?

MIKE: No.

AL: Good. Too sixties. We do say sorties, though, right?

MIKE: Yes.

AL: Don't forget. That'll be very important when we license the video game rights.

TED: This is the same bullshit you got us into twenty years ago, Browner.

BROWNER: If it was left to you, Ted, we'd be defending Des Moines in hand-to-hand combat by now.

TED: If it were left to you, we'd be nuking Puerto Rico.

AL: Can we stop arguing and get an assessment of the situation? Calmly, please.

BROWNER: You want an assessment?

AL: I'd like one. I have a shooting schedule.

BROWNER: You remember *Apocalypse Now*?

AL: Yes.

BROWNER: Good. You're in it.

TED: What are you saying, Browner?

BROWNER: I'm saying that Boland used the cease fire to get the drop on us, the double-crossing bastard.

TED: Boland? The guy who came to you with the film deal?

BROWNER: You catch on quick, Ted.

AL: This doesn't affect the financing, though. We're still doing the film, right?

BROWNER: Of course. Why let a war stop a movie shoot?

MIKE: You mean there's no cease fire?

BROWNER: Does this sound like a cease fire to you?

TED: I'm not ready for this, Petey. I'm not ready for it.

BROWNER: I'm sure they'll stop when they hear that, Ted.

Mike, beginning to hyperventilate, holds his chest. Al turns to him, ignoring his difficulty breathing.

AL: I wonder if we should work this development into the screenplay. Sort of a fog of war pandemonium. A Hitler's last days bunker scene.

TED: Al, I think we have more important things to be worrying about than polishing a script!

AL: Ted, relax. This is simply the pilot saying we're hitting a little turbulence. Buckle your seat belt. Peter, the U.N. should be able to put a cap on this pretty quickly, right?

Helicopter swoops by overhead. Loud machine gun fire heard. Browner holds his machine gun up with one hand and fires through the tent roof.

BROWNER: That answer your question?

MIKE: *(Getting his breath)* Are you insane? You can't even see who you're shooting at?

BROWNER: Ted, who is this piss ant?

TED: The writer.

BROWNER: I thought the writer was Mike.

TED: He is.

AL: *(Browner and Al exchange glances.)* Mike, Scott. They're generic names. Everybody under thirty looks the same to me these days.

BROWNER: *(To Mike)* You touched my papers?

MIKE: What? No.

BROWNER: I find out you touched my papers, you're going to be wearing your asshole on the outside of your jeans.

AL: Listen. May we please get a disinterested assessment of the situation without any gratuitous animosity? (*Browner looks at Al. Short pause.*)

BROWNER: Gratuitous animosity? What are you, a lawyer?

AL: But I'm moving into the film business.

BROWNER: Sorry, didn't recognize you without your money meter. Ted, who are these bozos? I thought you said this guy was directing.

TED: He is.

BROWNER: You need a law degree now to direct?

AL: It's a career change type of thing.

TED: Petey, would you forget about him and tell *me* what *you* are going to do about getting *us* the fuck out of here *now*?!

BROWNER: (*He extends the short-wave's mouthpiece to Ted.*) Here, call yourself a cab, Ted. Don't let me stop you.

TED: What about Hicks? When's he due back?

BROWNER: Hicks has been landing thirty miles south of here for weeks.

AL: Hicks is back? With the film?

TED: Thirty miles south? Petey . . .

AL: Does he have the film?

TED: Petey, why . . .

AL: Have you yourself seen the film?

TED: Al, would you forget the fucking film? The film is dead! Which is what we are going to be if you don't *shut up* and let me grovel productively here. (*Ted, having shoved Al aside, turns back to Browner.*) Petey, why, for weeks, has Hicks been landing thirty miles *south* of here?

BROWNER: Because that's the drop for the weapons, Ted. Now you know. Happy?

MIKE: Weapons?

AL: He must mean props. I've had them on back order now for weeks.

BROWNER: No, I mean guns, bozo. You think anybody'd put up twenty-five million to let you pinheads make a movie? You're a front.

TED: Twenty-five million? Twenty-five million? Petey, you told me twenty.

AL: (*To Ted*) You told me fifteen.

MIKE: (*To Al*) You told me . . . (*Mike mouths the word "five."*)

AL: It was an oversight, Mike. I'll get you a percentage of the net. I swear.

The gunfire grows noticeably louder.

TED: Browner, why are you telling me this now?

BROWNER: Because we're all going to be dead in thirty minutes, Ted.

MIKE: Dead!

AL: Movie dead, Mike. It's done with special effects.

TED: (*Crossing to Browner*) Petey, no gift is too large. I'm good for it, Petey. You know it, I know it. Only thing I ask: get my ass on a DC-9, driver knows how to get to L.A. OK? Pronto.

BROWNER: Ted, do yourself a favor. Sit down and shut up so I don't have to tear the tongue out of your head and nail it to the floor. You're pissing me off. *Comprende?*

The short-wave crackles. A voice begins to be heard through it.

SHORT-WAVE: Puddin' Pie this is Georgie Porgie. Do you read? Over.

BROWNER: Come in, Georgie Porgie. This is Puddin' Pie. We read.

SHORT-WAVE: We have signs of possible movement by Dark Shadows. Do you read? Repeat. Possible signs of movement by Dark Shadows in your vicinity.

BROWNER: Georgie Porgie, this is Puddin' Pie. I read. I read the fact that you morons can't tell "movement" from a slidefull of amoeba.

SHORT-WAVE: I think we want to stay technical on this, Puddin'.

Sound of rocket bombs exploding nearby.

BROWNER: Would you consider RPG-7s technical enough for you, dickhead?

SHORT-WAVE: You have incoming?

BROWNER: What's it sound like? I'm calling from a bowling alley?

AL: Ask him if he has any word on the film.

SHORT-WAVE: Do you have a reading on the incoming's direction, Puddin'?

BROWNER: Yeah, I have a reading. They're coming down! That's the point of bombs, imbecile. To fall!

TED: Tell them to get us out of here. *(Browner shoves Ted away.)* You scum! I don't care if you did save my life. I can buy you fifteen times over.

BROWNER: (*He points his gun at Ted.*) When I get done here I am going to personally stretch your dick so far you'll be able to hang yourself with it.

SHORT-WAVE: We show movement now at Vector T for tango, I, Reebok, 4. Repeat. Vector T for tango, I, Reebok, 4.

BROWNER: (*He snaps his fingers at Mike.*) Gimme the map! (*Beat*) The map! (*Beat*) The map!

Mike finally moves, tears the map from the wall, and brings it to Browner. Browner spreads it out on the table.

SHORT-WAVE: Do you read, Puddin'? Vector T for tango—

BROWNER: That's thirty miles *south* of us, pinhead!

TED: (*Crossing to Browner*) South? South is no good. Petey, south is no good!

BROWNER: Ted, I want a travel agent, I'll call one. (*He double checks the map, then, to radio*) I'm going to ask you one more time, nicely. Now, since they can't be *behind* our front lines, moron, check the fucking thing *again*!

TED: Al, south is no good. South is definitely bad. We'd be cut off.

AL: It's a typo, Ted. A blip on the screen. A the-computers-are-down kind of thing.

SHORT-WAVE: Position confirmed.

TED: We're dead. Al, we're dead men.

AL: Ted, calm down. We're not dead. We earn too much to be dead.

BROWNER: Now you want to tell me how Dark Shadow got behind me while you were supposed to be *monitoring him*?

TED: Al—

AL: Anybody asks, Ted, we're journalists. Canadian journalists.

MIKE: Do you think they'll take us hostage?

AL: That's a Middle-Eastern-PLO-Arab-Shiite-Muslim type thing. I wouldn't worry about it.

TED: Yeah, I wouldn't worry about it. The head of the death squad here's a real prince. We'll all be wearing our balls for earrings in two weeks.

SHORT-WAVE: Checking, and we've got a blank on that one, Puddin'. Repeat. One big blankola.

BROWNER: Well you listen to me, dickhead. You get some cavalry with wings on it up here now, or I swear to God I'll find your house, burn it down, and eat your children. Am I making myself perfectly *fucking clear*!?

Short wave begins to crackle wildly, then to whistle. Then it goes dead. In the background the gunfire grows louder and more persistent. A sudden, short burst nearby. Mike drops to his knees and places a hand on one shoulder. When he removes it, it's covered with blood. He shows it to Al.

AL: That's very authentic looking. But you shouldn't be playing with it.

MIKE: I'm shot.

AL: Don't go Method on me, Mike.

BROWNER: Georgie Porgie, Georgie Porgie! (*Silence from radio. He smashes the top of it with the butt of his machine gun.*) Cocksucking Jap-made piece of shit. Protect their fucking oil. Put up some trade barriers!

AL: Mike, don't bleed. We have a lot of rewriting to do when this is over.

MIKE: Al . . .

AL: It's all right. It's a small wound. At this rate you could probably go on bleeding for days.

TED: Don't think you're milking this for a lawsuit, kid.

AL: *(Al helps Mike up onto the table.)* Don't worry. Bleeding and dying are two different things. This is great experience. It should open up your writing tremendously. *(Mike sways on the table.)*

TED: Al. How are we going to get out of here?

AL: I don't know, Ted.

MIKE: I'm going to be sick. *(Al leans over to console Mike. As he does, Browner walks past them, heading back to the tent door.)*

BROWNER: You fucking cinch worm. You call yourself a writer.

AL: A screenwriter. His political commitments don't go any deeper than where to eat lunch.

BROWNER: Hemingway saw it, he'd puke.

TED: Petey, how are we going to get out of here?

BROWNER: By Batmobile, Ted. What do I know?

TED: I can't believe you don't have a back-up plan. I give dinner parties organized better than this.

AL: This is history, Ted. Chaos is a given.

TED: What about the cease fire?

BROWNER: *(Turns toward Ted and begins backing him up)* Cease fire? Cease fires are something dreamed up by politicians have to make a speech. You've got guys down here who'll start a revolution if their coffee's cold.

AL: He's right, Ted. Civilization's one big manic depressive mood swing.

Another helicopter swoops past overhead. Sound of machine gunfire. Hicks backs into the tent, firing a machine gun into the air above him. He has weapons strapped across his chest and back.

HICKS: Die, you slime-eating turd! *(He fires again, then turns and sees the others in the tent.)* Browner, you fucking bastard! I didn't sign on for Lebanon. My rate just tripled.

Ted has moved to the tent door. He looks out. Sound of gun shots. Ted drops to the floor. Hicks spins back toward the door and fires. Ted looks up and out through the door again.

TED: You got him.

HICKS: Of course I got him, dipshit. You think this is the LAPD, I get paid if I miss?

TED: *(Getting to his feet)* How did you know it was one of them?

HICKS: He wasn't wearing Coppertone.

BROWNER: Hicks, where's Boland?

HICKS: I thought you might tell me.

AL: *(Looks up, and leaves Mike)* Did you bring the film?

HICKS: *(To Browner)* He owes me six hundred grand, plus one fucking plane. They shot an engine out.

AL: Excuse me, but did you bring the film?

BROWNER: Boland wasn't at Westover's place?

HICKS: What do you think I'm doing here? I just left Westover's place. It's crawling with guys don't have a tan line.

BROWNER: How many?

HICKS: Tons, with guns. Looked like East L.A.

BROWNER: You landed there?

HICKS: Yeah, I landed there. And this guy is Steven Spielberg.

AL: Speaking of Spielberg, I'd just like to ask—

Ted, standing in the doorway, sees something.

TED: Incoming!

Ted dives to the floor, followed by Al, who lands at Hicks's feet. Hicks and Browner remain standing during the explosion. More dust pours into the tent.

MIKE: Oh, God. Oh, God.

BROWNER: And you didn't see any sign of Boland?

Al, still lying prone on the floor, is tugging at Hicks's pants cuff.

HICKS: What am I, a fucking AWAC? (*Al tugs at Hicks's cuff again. Hicks looks down at him.*) What?!

AL: Did you bring the film?

HICKS: (*Hicks puts the tip of his gun to Al's nose.*) Bub, I have wasted guys for taking my parking spot. Don't piss me off!

Sound of fighter jets swooping by overhead now, followed by explosions. Ted crawls back to the tent door and looks out.

TED: They hit the make-up trailer. They hit the fucking make-up trailer!

Al begins crawling toward Ted. Upstage, Mike notices the first aid kit on one of the tables and begins crawling toward it.

AL: Our shooting schedule's really shot to hell now.

As Mike reaches for the kit, Hicks snatches it without noticing him, opens the kit, takes out a bandage, and tosses the kit aside, out of Mike's reach. Hicks begins bandaging his finger.

BROWNER: You think Westover's dead?

HICKS: Either dead or paid off.

BROWNER: Boland got to him?

HICKS: Westover was as loyal as a hundred dollar hooker. We've been set up. How much have you seen from Boland?

BROWNER: Only a few million.

HICKS: Great. We just delivered twenty million worth of hardware to a bunch of falafels and they're coming at us with it, fast.

Browner begins pacing, while Hicks checks the map. Suddenly, Browner begins knocking things off the table.

BROWNER: God! Fuck!

HICKS: That's right. Let it out.

BROWNER: I hate being fucked by the guy I'm supposed to be fucking.

HICKS: Don't think this changes our Raiford deal.

BROWNER: Aw, fuck Raiford!

HICKS: Look at it this way. Now you turn around, come back with the media behind you, bomb 'em back into the Stone Age.

BROWNER: *(Beat)* That's good. That's very good.

HICKS: In the meantime, though, you should be worried about giving away twenty million in hardware. Or does that get put on the national Visa bill, too?

BROWNER: Can we save any of it?

HICKS: Yeah, call Federal Express, tell them you want a plane picked up for overnight delivery.

Outside the tent there is a loud explosion. Hicks and Browner begin loading weapons.

AL: There's Barry. (*Loud whisper*) Psst! Barry! (*Beat*) Barry!

TED: What's that in the woods?

AL: Where?

MIKE: (*He rises, eyes closed, and moves downstage toward center of the table.*)
Om . . .

TED: There!

MIKE: Om . . .

AL: You mean that thing that looks like a tank?

TED: Yes.

MIKE: Om . . .

AL: It's a tank.

HICKS: (*Hicks turns to Mike.*) Kid, would you shut up. You sound like a dial tone.

AL: Barry! The tank! Why are you running? Get the tank!

BROWNER: (*To Hicks*) That scumbag was going to buy me a ranch.

HICKS: Yeah, right. Could we just get the fuck out of here.

BROWNER: Your plane's out of commission?

HICKS: My plane's scrap metal.

BROWNER: (*Beat*) Westover keeps an old T-28 training jet stashed five miles from here.

TED: (*He leaves Al at the tent door and looks over at Browner.*) Are you working on getting us out of here, Petey?

BROWNER: I'm on it, Ted. (*Ted goes back to Al.*)

AL: Barry, the flame-thrower!

HICKS: That holds two. What about Moe, Larry, and Curly? Three months they're going to turn up on an Amnesty International report.

BROWNER: (*Glancing at them*) Acceptable losses.

They return to loading, hurrying now. Ted leaves the door and checks with them once more.

TED: We almost out of here, Petey?

BROWNER: Almost, Ted.

AL: (*Through door*) Don't hide. Keep shooting. More, more.

TED: Al!

AL: There's billions in free F/X out there.

TED: This is not a movie! Would you get that through your head.

AL: Ted, I get an ulcer pain, my tooth aches, my back goes out— that's real. Everything else *is* a movie.

BROWNER: When I find Boland he is fucking dead.

HICKS: (*Crossing downstage, by tent door*) Browner, would you just let that die. You trusted a guy told you to make a film he wanted burned.

Al and Ted turn quickly to look at Hicks, then Browner.

AL: What are we burning? Who's burning—

TED: Petey—

AL: If that film is in any way, or has in any manner been tampered with, doctored, misappropriated, or mangled—

HICKS: Your film's in an ashtray, pal.

AL: Al.

TED: Petey, you knew about this?

AL: That film can't have been burned without my OK. I have creative control.

HICKS: Your film is toast.

AL: But I had such great footage.

TED: Browner, you lying, scum-sucking, son-of-a-bitch! You fucking mercenary!

BROWNER: (*Grabbing Ted and throwing him onto the table*) I'm not the one who sold out for money, piss ant. I sold out for a good fucking cause.

TED: Yeah? What?

BROWNER: Democracy!

AL: I can see that there's no choice other than to bring suit.

HICKS: Good. Sue me posthumously. Browner, you coming?

Browner releases Ted, and begins to go. Ted springs up from the table and grabs his arm.

TED: Petey, we're going?

BROWNER: What do you think this is, Ted? A fucking buddy movie? Get your hands off me.

MIKE: Why are you all fighting? You should be trying to help each other.

HICKS: What are you, a nun? Browner, let's go.

Browner grabs the last of his weapons and heads for the door. Ted pursues him.

TED: Petey. A ranch. Get me out of this, I'll give you a ranch.

BROWNER: Next time, Ted.

HICKS: Let's go.

Hicks darts out of the tent. Browner looks, then follows. The sporadic gunfire in the distance gradually becomes louder, and more persistent. Helicopters swoop by with regularity. Al goes to the tent door and watches with fascination. Mike sits slumped in a chair at the table. Ted paces, then finally explodes.

TED: What kind of world is this? Suddenly the guy you're bribing has to like you?!

AL: What can I say, Ted? Even greed is fickle nowadays. A familiarity breeds contempt sort of thing.

TED: *(Crossing to the tent door and looking out. Beat.)* It looks like we're surrounded by the entire dark-skinned world. *(Beat)* Or do you think it could be *our* army? *(Beat)* Al, we can make it to the Land Rover. If we can make it to the Land Rover, we can make a run for it.

AL: We can't make it to the Land Rover, Ted.

TED: *(Leaving the tent door)* I am not prepared to die here!

AL: It's something out of our hands, Ted.

The gunfire grows louder and more distinct. Al becomes completely absorbed by it. He has made a "view finder" with his thumb and index fingers and looks out the tent door through it.

TED: Al.

AL: This is great material. Mike, come and look at this.

Mike looks up, sees Al, slowly rises, and moves toward the tent door. He stumbles and reaches Al on his knees. Al puts a hand on his shoulder and together they watch through the doorway.

TED: Are you insane? We are not watching this thing on TV. We are going to die! *(Beat)* Answer me!

Al stands with Mike beside him, looking through his “view finder,” panning the scene outside the tent. Smoke begins eddying into the tent as the lights begin to fade, the tent wall backlit by the spectacle outside. Rainbow-colored tracer bullets arc across the background, the silhouette of helicopter props appear on the tent walls, and explosions flash all around. Lights fade to near total darkness, the carnival warfare in the background growing more distinct.

AL: Look out there, Mike. Look. (Short pause) Now this . . . this would make a great movie.

Volume of gunfire and explosions swell until a cacophony engulfs the stage, and the lights fade to black.

END